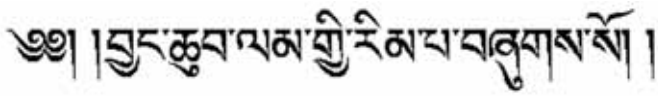

The Condensed Lam Rim



Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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Since we are a gathering of meditators the appropriate thing for us to do, as usual, is to meditate. When a group of meditators get together that is what we do, meditate. That principal would be true for other gatherings. For example, when a gathering of beer drinkers gets together they drink beer (*laughter*). So it seems that there are different social groups that gather for specific purposes.

It is interesting to note how we need to have some company. We need to have a social gathering in order to do something together. It seems that there are also coffee drinking groups, people who gather to have coffee together. Even though I would not consider myself a coffee consumer, once in a while I have a coffee. Someone said, 'Oh Geshe-la, it might be good for you to join into the coffee group.' That's how I learned about it.

What one can understand from this social gathering of people is that it is done to have more enjoyment in what they are doing. It seems to be more enjoyable to have coffee with friends who also like coffee rather than having coffee by oneself. It is the same with a drink or anything else. We can see that this is the purpose of these gatherings. However I am not accustomed to having to be with others in order to enjoy something. My happiness is more about being quiet, alone and happy by myself.

The point that I want to emphasise in bringing this up is that while it is obvious, and we all know that there are different social groups, I feel that a gathering to meditate may be a supreme gathering, something that is most worthwhile and meaningful.

We all have a natural tendency to need to belong to a group; we have want to be in a social group. If we have that desire and want to belong to a social group, then we should investigate what kind of group would be most worthwhile and meaningful in our life. When one investigates it would be useful to find out the nature of that gathering, its purpose and so forth, and then adopt that. This would be worthwhile for us to do.

In my case and others in my situation, we were placed into a social group of meditators or people were inclined to meditate and practice. It is not as if I had a choice. I was placed into the monastery by my parents when I was quite young. So that is how I grew up with that influence.

The reason I was placed in a monastery by my parents at a quite a young age was because of a prediction by a great geshe, who was known to have unobstructed clairvoyance. According to our tradition, my parents met with this geshe when they were seeking a name for me. While giving me my name he also predicted, 'If your son were to be placed in a monastery and became a monk, he

would become a geshe in the future.' That is why my parents put me in the monastery. It seems that that prediction came true, as I did become a geshe.

However, as I regularly share with you, although I have completed the geshe study program, I have to confess that I do not have the full knowledge of a geshe.

It seems that I got a bit sidetracked. The main point that I was making earlier is that there are various social gatherings. The purpose of this gathering is to engage in the practice of meditation; to learn and to implement our practice of meditation. We have made that choice and it is apparently a good, meaningful choice.

I see a gathering to engage in the practice of meditation as a supreme gathering with a meaningful purpose. That is how I would describe it. But, as I regularly emphasise, you should not take my words for granted and just assume that this is the best. Rather, you need to investigate and find out the purpose and techniques of meditation that are presented, and query, analyse and test whether it is right for you or not. Thus, if you find through your own investigation, using your own intelligence and wisdom, that it is suitable and worthwhile you can accept it. That it is the appropriate way to proceed.

Having done sufficient investigation and found through your own analysis that it is useful and beneficial. When you join the group and you feel you are part of the group, it will become a stable choice for you. I can attest to the fact that there are a few amongst my students who have not missed any of my teachings since they arrived. Quite a few. I relate that as a testimony.

To prepare for meditation, as I emphasise to those of you who come regularly, the main point is to check one's physical posture and ensure that it is relaxed and comfortable. It is also essential to ensure that one's state of mind is equally relaxed and, most importantly, that one is in a clear and bright state of mind. For the practice of meditation it is essential to make sure that one is in a refreshed state of mind. Meditation practice becomes a more genuine practice within a fresh and clear state of mind. Besides being essential for meditation practice, it is important that we try to maintain a clear, bright and fresh state of mind in our daily life and that will assist us to make whatever activities we do more meaningful and worthwhile.

To summarise, the purpose of adopting a technique such as meditation is to make one's mind more serviceable and to also make it more conducive to having a positive frame of mind. That is really the purpose, to familiarise our mind with positiveness.

It is good to have the doubt within oneself, 'Why is it necessary to engage in the practice of meditation? Why is it necessary to acquire that clear, bright and focussed state of mind? Why is that necessary?' As I also mention regularly, if there is a sound reason why something works then it is more likely that we will adopt it.

Practising the technique of meditation is a means for one to utilise the potential of the essence of one's being. This potential is summarised in what are called 'the three doors', the activities of our body, speech and mind. The

meditation technique is a means to fully utilise the potential for our three doors to be in a positive state by not allowing them to be influenced by the delusions. That is how it ensures they are in a positive state.

If our three doors are under the influence of the delusions then that opposes a clear, bright and calm state of mind. If one understands that process, one can see the significance of redirecting our attention and potential in a positive way. If we were to investigate how we conduct ourselves in a regular day we would notice that there are times that we are severely dominated by either of the delusions and that then causes distress within us. When we are under the influence of strong attachment the mind of desire or attachment completely overwhelms us. It is as if we are completely under the control of attachment and, to that extent, the mind becomes agitated and very unclear. That is what causes the disturbances in the mind. It is the same with other delusions such as anger. They do exactly the same as well.

When we are under the dominance and influence of a strong delusion such as attachment, our mind is completely overwhelmed. Our demeanour is disturbed. Our conduct is also disturbed. To overcome that and bring our state of mind to a more tranquil and calm state the teachings recommend meditating on the unattractive features of the object that one is attached to. When one meditates on the unattractive features of the object one's perception of the object is changed. Rather than seeing the exaggerated qualities of the object the mind immediately becomes settled by focussing on the unattractive features of the object. In that way we can see that there is an immediate positive effect on the mind and it becomes more calm and tranquil.

It is the same with anger. When the mind is under the influence of strong anger it becomes disturbed and any sense of calmness and peace is completely disturbed. Meditation on love is the most appropriate means to overcome that strong influence of anger. As we meditate on love, focussing on the very object that one has strong anger towards, we find that there is an immediate positive effect.

If we understand how the meditation technique works with specific delusions and how to overcome them, then that is how we understand how the meditation technique works. It works in the same manner, on every occasion. Whatever the delusion that arises in the mind, there is an appropriate antidote to overcome that particular delusion. So, this is how we need to understand the overall positive effect of the practice of meditation.

The way that the meditation technique helps to overcome delusions and calm our mind and make it much more settled is by diverting our attention away from the object that causes a particular delusion to arise. Rather than focusing on the object in a negative light, the practice of meditation diverts us from the negative perspective and directs us towards a virtuous, more positive state of mind. When the mind is in a positive or virtuous frame we experience the positive effect of the mind becoming calm, tranquil and peaceful again. This is how we need to understand how the meditation technique works.

When we begin to see and experience the actual effects of meditation in overcoming particular delusions we will begin to realise that there are many meditation techniques that we can adopt to help us overcome particular negative states of mind. So, in that way, we will end up realising that there are many meditation techniques. There is no time for us to become bored with meditation. We will find that there are many different kinds of meditation techniques that we can use in our day-to-day activities. In this way we will find that we become enriched with many meditation techniques.

Having mentioned that there are many techniques of meditation that one can adopt to overcome particular negative states of mind some might ask, 'Why not have one meditation technique that will suffice for all? Why have so many different meditation techniques and different sorts of objects? Couldn't it be one meditation technique that will cover all?'

To answer that question, we first need to realise that the way our mind works is very complex. We can begin to notice for ourselves there are many different, sneaky ways that our mind becomes affected with the delusions. As there are many different kinds of delusions that arise in our mind it is necessary to have particular meditation techniques to overcome the particular delusions as they arise in different forms.

To be more specific, when, for example, one is affected by strong anger, if we don't tackle that particular state of mind there is no way for us to be able to sit down and practice a meditation focusing on something else. It just wouldn't work. Even if we sit down cross-legged, close our eyes and focus on the breath, unless and until we have overcome the state of anger any other meditation would not work because the mind of anger has not been appeased or overcome. The most appropriate way of overcoming anger would be to meditate on love. That would directly overcome the state of mind of anger.

It is the same with strong attachment. If the mind is agitated by the delusion of attachment then any other technique or thing that we do will be tainted with that. We will not be able to have a focused mind. So we need to try to tackle the delusion of attachment and that is done most effectively by focusing on the unattractive attributes of the object that we are attached to. It is in this way that we can see how particular techniques work for overcoming particular negative states of mind.

When we understand that within one individual the mind is very complex and has many ways for the delusions to arise we can then begin to understand how when we put different individuals together it becomes even more complex because each individual's mind works in their own way and how their delusions manifest. There are so many different ways in which the delusions manifest in individual beings. It is because of the infinite intricacies of how the delusions may arise in infinite numbers of beings that the Buddha, with his omniscient mind, presented different techniques that will soothe the different inclinations of different beings. When we understand that, we can begin to get a genuine respect and admiration for the Buddha and the skilful

means he used to present the teachings in many different ways that will suit different individual beings.

Having mentioned that there are various techniques, the technique that we adopt here is the technique of using our breath as an object of focus. Focusing on one's breath is said to be a very effective technique to overcome a lot of discursive and distracting thoughts. It is also useful for those whose thoughts may be influenced by strong emotions such as anger or attachment.

When someone is affected with the discursive thoughts of attachment and anger their mind is like a jumble. It would hard to tackle any one particular delusion when the mind is distracted with so many discursive thoughts. To attempt to overcome anger or attachment with a particular technique of focusing on a particular type of meditation when the mind is already distracted will not work for a beginner. It would not be appropriate or work well because meditations such as meditation on love or the unattractive features of the object require some analytical meditation and some thinking processes in a positive way. If the mind is already distracted and agitated with many discursive thoughts or distractions it is not possible to focus it on a particular stream of positiveness.

Therefore, it is said that one should first meditate and focus on the breath, which is a neutral and very simple object, as the most effective way to appease the discursive thoughts in the mind. Then, when the mind has settled down and focused, we can use it to apply other meditation techniques. Therefore, at a beginner's level or for those who are affected by discursive thoughts, it is said that the technique of focusing on one's breath is most effective. I regularly emphasise this as I assume that many of us have discursive thoughts and agitated minds.

The technique itself may seem simple. It is just focusing on the breath, a neutral object with which we are all intimately familiar. We all breathe regularly so, as an object to focus on, it is not vague or complex. It is very simple. However, one must apply the technique fully in order to derive the positive effect of the meditation. This means that one must pay full attention to focusing on one's breath during our session of meditation. If we have set ourselves a goal to focus on our breath for 21 rounds then, for those 21 rounds of our breath, we need to be *fully* committed to focusing on our breath and not allow the mind to become distracted.

If we apply the technique appropriately and place our full attention and focus on the breath itself and nothing else, then the positive effect that we derive from this is that the mind *does* become settled down. If our mind had earlier been distracted with many discursive thoughts and so forth that all settles down and the mind become clear and focused. Within that clear and focused state of mind we then obtain a certain serviceability of the mind and we will then be able to use that calmness, tranquillity and focused state of mind to adopt different techniques of meditation such as meditating on love in order to overcome anger or meditating on the unattractive features of an object to overcome attachment and so forth. It is definitely mentioned in the teachings that when the mind is in a tranquil state it is possible to use that state of

mind for any virtuous activity. This is why I never underestimate the value of the practice of focusing on the breath. It seems to serve a high purpose and is a meaningful practice.

In order to adopt the meditation technique we can again briefly recall the benefits of the practice of meditation. If we don't apply the meditation technique we will just let our mind be in its natural state of being completely immersed in discursive thoughts and influenced by negativities, and we will experience the ill effects of that. Our mind will be full of anxiety, worries, fear and lacking in self-confidence, and so forth. If we don't want to experience that, if we want to have a clear and bright state of mind where we have self-confidence and utilise the full potential of our mind, we need to take the meditation practice seriously and commit ourselves to adopt the practice well during the time that we allocate.

The technique itself involves withdrawing all our attention from all other thoughts and plans and so forth. We completely withdraw our minds from other activities right now. Firstly we bring all of our focus inward. Then, as we tune in with our breathing, we place our full awareness upon our breath. Focusing on our breath means being fully aware of the breath going in and going out. As advised in the teachings, as we maintain our focus and awareness on the breath it is also useful to mentally count each breath coming in and going out. We just imagine that we are counting the breath coming in and going out. We can set a certain goal for ourselves, such as 21 breaths. That is a useful method.

The main thing is to be mindful of each breath coming in and going out and not to let our mind wander to anything else. Initially we would find that maybe it is not easy to do that. We find our mind wandering. But with commitment and with time we will find that it becomes more and more natural. Then we can find that the mind really settles down and becomes a clear state of mind. So, for the next few minutes, that is what we will be doing with our own personal commitments. (*Pause for meditation.*)

That will be sufficient for now. Before we conclude for the evening I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has been coming regularly. Some have been coming throughout the year and it is really incredible that you have been able to do that. Not only have you come to these sessions, you have listened with very good attention and with a pleasant demeanour. That is also really incredible.

The reason why I show my appreciation and really find that it's incredible and praise you in this way is not that I believe that this has anything to do with my side. It is showing the quality from your side that you have the ability to come and pay attention and show that good demeanour. That is why it is praiseworthy from my side.

As I regularly emphasise, the good conduct that you have that makes others joyful and happy is something really precious and valuable. We all have that potential, so it is important that we try to protect and maintain that.

From my side, what I can assure you of is that my intentions in sharing are the purest intentions that I can

muster. They are not mixed with any personal interest or gain. My sole intention is sharing whatever I have understood. I'm not saying that I have much knowledge that I can share with you, but whatever I have been able to share with you is done with the sole intention that it could be of benefit for you in your life. That is something that I can assure you of.

As I also mentioned in the past, even though I cannot claim to have any real qualities or values, one thing that I can say that I possess, and that I can even boast about is that I have a happy, joyous mind. That is something that I do have. That definitely benefits me and it also seems to benefit others.

I can recount experiences I have had with students in the past. As older students would recall, I used to go and have tea with the students in the dining room. I haven't done that recently because it takes quite a bit of time. However, during the time that I used to sit in the lounge and have tea with students who had come to the classes some of the newer students would come up and just chat with me. Some of them made comments to me that I recall very well. They were being very honest and direct with me saying, 'I didn't really understand much of what you were explaining. Nevertheless, your appearance of joyfulness and your smile made me feel very glad and happy. So I did enjoy that.' In sharing that with me, I learned something for myself.

While I show my appreciation for your attendance and attention and so forth, the reason that we are able to gather here and be in this place is because of the premises and the conditions that the centre provides. So it is appropriate for us to all show our appreciation to Tara Institute.

What we call Tara Institute, or the centre, only exists through the kindness of regular contributors, members and others who have made donations and so forth. Due to that we have the material facility to run the program and so forth. That is really incredible, and we can see the great benefit of those contributions. Therefore it is very appropriate for me to thank the members and other donors who provide these services.

We all enjoy the good conditions regularly. We enjoy gathering here, sharing worthwhile time in meaningful discussions and also being able to relax afterwards and have a cup of tea and a few cookies. All of that has to come from somewhere. The means have to be provided by others. It is the members and the donors who make that possible. So we can see their contributions have definitely not gone to waste and are definitely used in a very appropriate way. Therefore that is something that it is good for us to acknowledge.

It is also important for us to acknowledge that the good, harmonious relationship that we have with each other also contributes to the good environment that we are in. I notice that students have a good rapport, good communication and good conduct with each other. That is something else that I would like to acknowledge and thank you for.

We are now close to a time of significant holidays and celebrations. Christmas celebrates a famous event, and I

have heard that millions are spent on the New Year's celebrations for the fireworks and other things. This happens here and up in Sydney as well. It's like lots of money being blown up into the air in a few moments! (*lots of laughter*) But it must give some sort of joy, that's why people do it. Although I don't know if that in itself would contribute much in the way of becoming famous in the world.

Sometimes I wonder about the way in which the government uses money (*laughter*). I wonder about how money is being utilised by governments, local governments and communities. I wonder whether sometimes a lot of money may be used for something that does not have much value and is quite insignificant. Those in positions of power are making these kinds of decisions. I wonder if they were to consider the money that belongs to the community or to the government as if it were their own money they would spend as much on one's own personal use or not? So if one were to consider the the community's money as if it were one's own money and use it for a value that one would use for one's own self I feel that the money could be utilised in a much more significant way. That's how I feel about it.

To give one example, I heard of an instance where it came to light that \$50,000 was used for one politician's phone. I think he came from Victoria. It's not that he used it for himself for his work, but he gave it to his son to use. Of course, these are just my opinions and there is no way I can control this at all because I am not in power. But I do wonder if those authorities could pay a little bit more attention to the way money is being used. I feel it would be significant to have a little bit more scrutiny of that.

I have heard that there is no limit to ministers' phone usage. They can use limitless amounts on their phone. Whereas I have heard that in America they have certain limits. Even if you are working for the government as a minister there is a certain limit that you are not supposed to go over in a year.

Let us leave that be, as it is not really a matter for us to discuss (*laughter*). Getting back to the main point, I was mentioning earlier that the festive season called Christmas and New Year is observed in many parts of the world, not just Australia. The main point is that, as the festive season comes up, it is good for us to ensure that we partake in this festive season in a really joyful state of mind. To partake in it with a joyful state of mind means that one needs to be wary that when one prepare oneself to go to an event, like any family occasion or gathering, so that one won't be influenced by negative states of mind. One should go to an event with a joyful state of mind so that one also comes back with a joyful state of mind. Otherwise what I find is that people go with an intention to be joyful and merry but all sorts of negativities arise during the gathering and they can come back quite sick. One can be physically sick, or feel mentally or psychologically down and disturbed. That can occur.

What I am emphasising relates to accounts that I have heard in the past from others who said that they had an intention to be merry and have a good time with their family and relatives, but ended up becoming quite

disturbed and unhappy. They were saying that they were quite astonished as to why would that be. Why would you come back quite miserable from a party rather than being joyous? When one investigates further it seems that being with relatives and other family members can lead to a jealous state of mind overtaking one. One can start to feel jealous of others who seem to be more affluent or successful in another way.

If one were to look into the main cause of feeling miserable when you come back from partaking in such occasions one would find it relates to not having paid attention to one's own state of mind. I regularly emphasise the necessity of applying mindfulness and introspection. It is essential and important, not only in meditation, but in every day life. Those are two essential tools that we need to adopt. When we go out to occasions we need to maintain mindfulness and use our introspection to check what is going on in our mind.

Others have confided in me that when they go to a family gathering there can be a lot of anxiety about what could come up next. Apparently, on such occasions sometimes the father or mother or some relative might bring up old stuff. That then brings up other memories and feelings of bitterness. That is how supposedly merry and joyous occasions turn out to be quite uncomfortable and miserable. While we might not be able to stop others from bringing up things that would be disturbing one can, if one has prepared, protect one's mind. So, regardless of what they say, just try to maintain a neutral state of mind and try not to be too affected.

As I regularly emphasise, one must not, at all costs, allow one's joyous and happy state of mind to be disturbed by anything that is happening around one. If one is not mindful and does not consider a joyous state of mind as worthwhile and essential it could be easily destroyed and influenced by others. One must be determined to not lose one's happy and joyous state of mind regardless of what is going on around one. That will maintain one's integrity and one will be able to maintain one's composure in whatever situation.

Thus, to summarise the main points, while we can rightly enjoy the festive season we must be mindful and not be carried away such that we are influenced to have too much to drink. That can definitely be harmful to us. There are apparently accounts of how it can also cause cancer. So that is something that we have to be mindful of. While a bit of drinking may be permissible for those who feel the need, it is good to be mindful not to drink too much as that can be detrimental to one's health.

Likewise we need to protect our state of mind and not allow our mind to be influenced by different kinds of negative states of mind or attitudes and so forth but maintain our integrity and prepare oneself to be mindful. Physically we need to observe our eating so that we do not overeat or eat things that could be harmful to us.

This will maintain our mental and physical health. If we maintain our physical and mental health then we can definitely enjoy such a joyous occasion again and be able to come back here in the new year and continue in the practice of meditation and so forth. So this is something

that I, from my side, pray will happen again. You can also, from your own side, ensure that protection.

After a short break, we will resume with meditation from the first Monday in January onwards. Then there will also be a Wednesday practice conducted by two different teachers at two different times, Judy Mayne and Allys Andrews. Both of them are experienced students who I have known for many years and I can assure you that not only do they have an understanding and knowledge of the Buddhist practices, but they are also very kind hearted. I know that as a definite fact myself. So it is worthwhile for you to come to those classes and enjoy that time here. There are the Monday evenings as well as the Wednesday evenings throughout January.

My teachings will resume on the 8 February. That means that I am having a small break, but that is the only break that I get throughout the year. I feel it is okay to have that break. Other teachers in other centres seem to have more holidays and so forth that I don't have. To give an example, I think we started the first teaching this year on 8 February and there hasn't been a break until now. The main thing is that if this has contributed to us having a happier, more joyous life then it has significantly served its purpose.

What I emphasise again and again, particularly for the younger generations, is to try to develop what we call inner wisdom so that one will not be influenced by what others have to say. That is not to say that one shouldn't listen to others' advice and so forth at all. But if one can develop that inner wisdom it will be much more sustainable, much more stable. That is something that I like to encourage, particularly the younger generation, to keep in mind. So, with that, I conclude and say *tashi delek*.

As part of our normal tradition, we will first recite the mantra of Buddha Shakyamuni. We shouldn't forget Buddha Shakyamuni! Before we conclude we will again take a few minutes of time for the opportunity to develop a focused mind. This time the object of our focus will be the sound of the mantra of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra being recited. We maintain our complete focus on the sound of the mantra and maintain that focus while the recitation is going on.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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